

Louisiana Extension Educators' Perceptions of the Benefit and Relevance of Participating in an International Extension Experience toward Their Career

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess Extension educators' perceptions of the benefit and relevance of an international Extension experience (IEE) toward their career. It was concluded that almost two-thirds of Extension educators perceive that participation in an IEE is beneficial and relevant to their careers. Further, Extension educators perceive the following barriers to participation in an IEE: a) cost, (b) time commitment, and (c) work obligation. Extension educators who perceive participation in an IEE as beneficial and relevant to their career perceive the locations rated for an IEE to be more appealing and the activities they experience during an IEE to be more important than Extension educators who do not perceive an IEE as beneficial or relevant to their career. However, no differences exist in Extension agents' perceptions of barriers between educators who perceive participation in an IEE as beneficial and relevant to their career and those who do not perceive that an IEE as beneficial and relevant. As a result of these findings, it can be recommended that Extension administrators should put forth an effort to promote and create opportunities for Extension educators to participate in an IEE.

Keywords: Extension educators; international experience; location; activities; barriers

As the borders between countries are seemingly disappearing, it is becoming progressively vital for professionals and organizations to become more globally minded (Andreasen, 2003; Lamm & Harder, 2010). According to Friedman (1999) and Blake (2005), globalization is a continuous process because opportunities to communicate internationally are plentiful among educational programs and organizations. Further, in this age of globalization, it is crucial for Americans to realize that the United States has an integral role in the global market and to recognize that there are significant benefits to fulfilling such role (Boyd, Felton, & Dooley, 2004). As internationalization becomes more prominent in the coming years, Extension's

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mission for economic and clientele well-being will be significantly influenced by the inclusion of international dimensions (Ludwig, 2001). Extension faculty and personnel alike must be mindful of the relationship between Extension's mission and international issues. Extension educators should not only recognize Extension's role in the international arena, but put forth a significant effort to include an international scope into their programming (Bates, 2006; Ludwig, 1995).

One known effort to increase international scope in Extension programming is encouraging Extension educators to participate in an international experience (Smith, Jayaratne, Moore, Kistler, & Smith, 2010). However, Franklin, Al-Hassan, Elliot, and Knight (2004) purported that few opportunities exist for Extension educators to participate in an international experience as a result of decreasing budgets. Yet, Extension educators who have participated in an international experience have shown to be more committed to integrating an international dimension into their programming (Ludwig, 2002). In fact, Lundy, Place, Irani, and Telg (2006) found that extension personnel recognize Extension's role in educating clientele about global issues. Extension educators can use non-formal activities as a means of educating clientele on the impact of globalization (Smith et al., 2010). Clients having a broad understanding of globalization will help facilitate Extension educators' integration of an international component in their programming. Furthermore, Extension educators can gain international knowledge and competencies by directly being immersed into another culture outside of the United States borders (Smith et al., 2010).

State Extension directors and administrators have a significant role in the internationalization of Extension. Franklin et al. (2004) suggested State Extension directors and administrators may be more inclined to add an international dimension to their programming if there were incentives and acknowledgement of efforts, sufficient funding, and foreign language training. These factors could potentially transform into support mechanisms for field faculty in their efforts to participate in an international experience and incorporate international activities into their programming on the regional, state, district, and county levels (Franklin et al., 2004). Lundy et al. (2006) stated Extension educators' attitudes toward an international experience in Extension may be positively impacted through ample opportunities to participate in an international experience and administration providing incentives for participation.

Franklin et al. (2004) found that directors and administrators in Extension self-reported they had gained foreign language, volunteer training, and program planning skills through their previous international experiences that would support international programming efforts. Further, Selby, Peters, Sammons, Branson, & Balschweid (2004) suggested that state Extension personnel take advantage of the previous international experiences of Extension agents and other Extension personnel which can provide an avenue for multicultural experience for clientele without having to cross state lines or international borders. Extension educators may be more likely to integrate international activities into their programs if they are exposed to international experiences and training. Given the opportunity, Extension educators may develop professional relationships with colleagues who have included international activities into their programs which potentially could have a positive impact on the efforts to globalize Extension (Lundy et al., 2006).

Participation in an international experience provides a multitude of personal and professional benefits for Extension educators, including personal and professional growth and a greater awareness of global matters (Blake, 2005). Further, increased appreciation for cultural differences among people, higher self-esteem, and stronger commitment to future Extension programming locally and abroad are benefits Extension educators experience as a result of participating in international experiences (Blake, 2005; Place, Evans, Andrews, & Crago, 2000; Place, Jacob, Andrews, & Crago, 2002;). Additionally, Extension educators are better able to interact with existing clientele and reach out to new clientele to promote awareness of international issues (Place, Vergot, Dragon, & Hightower, 2008). Lastly, Extension educators benefit from participating in an international experience by learning about the structure of Extension systems throughout the world (Blake, 2005; Lundy et al., 2006). As a result of the

numerous benefits, participation in an international experience equips Extension educators with valuable experiences to be successful in today's globalized environment (Harder, Place, & Scheer, 2010; Ludwig, 1995).

While the benefits of participating in an international experience may be plentiful for Extension educators, researchers have identified barriers that often prevent Extension educators from participating in an international experience. Barriers such include (a) lack of time and financial support, (b) foreign language skills, (c) family obligations, (d) lack of support from clientele, (e) lack of priority in programming, and (f) lack of experience, (g) lack of opportunity to participate, (h) fear of other cultures, (i) cultural biases, (j) lack of desire, (k) fear of political unrest, and (l) fear of lost opportunities (Andreasen, 2003; Dooley & Rouse, 2009; Franklin et al., 2004; Lamm & Harder, 2010; Ludwig, 2001; Ludwig, 2002; Selby et al., 2004). If Extension is to become internationalized in the coming years, Extension directors, administrators, and field personnel should make continuous efforts to identify and eliminate barriers, encourage participation, and emphasize the importance to participating in an international experience (Andreasen, 2003; Franklin et al., 2004; Lamm & Harder, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study was Icek Ajzen's (2006) Theory of Planned Behavior which describes human behavior as being guided by three beliefs: (a) behavioral, (b) normative, and (c) control. Ajzen (2006) concluded that by manipulating these beliefs, an individual's behavior can be predicted and influenced, which can ultimately increase the likelihood of the individual performing a specific behavior.

According to Ajzen (2006), behavioral beliefs describe a person's attitude, favorable or unfavorable, toward a specific behavior. If an individual perceives the favorable outcomes of a specific behavior offset the unfavorable outcomes, the individual will be more likely to perform the specified behavior (Ajzen, 2006). Specifically, Extension educators would be more likely to participate in an international Extension experience (IEE) if they perceive a more favorable attitude toward an IEE. As such, when considering the appeal of specific locations as destinations for an IEE, an individual may have a more favorable attitude toward one location rather than another location which could increase the likelihood of that individual participating in an IEE (Lamm & Harder, 2010). Also, if an Extension educator perceives participating in an IEE will outweigh the associated time, they will likely participate (Lamm & Harder, 2010). Further, if Extension educators perceive activities in which they participate while on an IEE to be more important, they will be more likely to participate (Harder, Lamm, Ganpat, & Lindner, 2011). Thus, if an Extension educator perceives negative outcomes to participating in an IEE such as contracting diseases or becoming a victim of crime or terrorism, they will be less likely to participate (Francis et al., 2004; Lamm & Harder, 2010).

Normative beliefs describe an individual's belief about what others expect regarding the specific behavior and the degree to which the individual experiences social pressure to perform that behavior (Ajzen, 2006). If an individual perceives that a specific behavior is expected from their peer group, it is more likely the individual will perform the behavior (Ajzen, 2006). An individual's work environment can play a significant role in their perceptions of and participation in an IEE (Akpan & Martin, 1996). If participation in an IEE is an expectation of their programming set by their administration, an Extension educator may be more likely to participate (Akpan & Martin, 1996). Likewise, an Extension educator's family or peers' positive or negative perceptions and connotations regarding international work could have an impact on their decision to participate in an IEE (Place et al., 2002). Extension educators are more likely to participate in an IEE if participation is highly valued by their family or peer groups. (Ajzen, 2006; Francis et al., 2004).

Finally, control beliefs describe an individual's belief toward reasons that can potentially enable or hinder performance (Ajzen, 2006; Francis et al., 2004). Extension educators' willingness to participate in an IEE may be negatively affected by the cost of the trip (Harder et al., 2011). Further, if Extension educators fear experiencing language barriers and ethnic prejudices, they may not be willing to participate (Andreasen, 2003; Francis et al., 2004). Because Extension educators have no control over their job requirements, they may have limited opportunities to participate in an IEE (Franklin et al., 2004).

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to assess Louisiana Extension educators' perceptions of the benefit and relevance of participating in an IEE toward their career. The research study addresses Research Priority 1 "Public and Policy Maker Understanding of Agriculture and Natural Resources" of the American Association for Agricultural Education Research Agenda for 2011-2015 (Doerfert, 2011). Six research questions guided this study:

1. What were the personal and professional characteristics of Extension educators in Louisiana?
2. To what extent did Extension educators perceive participating in an international Extension experience to be beneficial and relevant to their career?
3. What were Extension educators' perceptions of location appeal, importance of activities included, and barriers regarding international Extension experiences?
4. Did relationships exist between Extension educators' prior international experience and their perceived level of benefit and relevance of participation in an international Extension experience toward their career?
5. Did differences exist in Extension educators' location preferences, activity preferences, and perceived barriers based on the level of benefit they perceived toward participating in an international Extension experience toward their career?
6. Did differences exist in Extension educators' location preferences, activity preferences, and perceived barriers based on the level of relevance they perceived toward participating in an international Extension experience toward their career?

Methods

Population and Sample

The target population for this study consisted of the 184 Extension educators in Louisiana. The researchers used Cochran's (1977) sample size formula to determine the minimum returned sample size ($n = 72$). Since a 50% response rate was anticipated, the final sample size selected was 144. One of the Extension educators was removed as a result of frame error, and nine opted out of the study. The revised sample was 134 Extension educators in Louisiana. The response rate was 53% as usable responses were collected from 71 of the Extension educators.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was originally developed by Rieger (n.d.) to assess undergraduate students' inclination to participate in a study abroad experience. This instrument was modified by Lamm & Harder (2010) to reflect Extension agents' perceptions of participation in international Extension experiences. Lamm & Harder granted permission for the researchers to use the instrument. The instrument was reviewed by a panel of three faculty and six graduate level doctoral students at Louisiana State University to establish face and content validity.

Regarding the panel of experts, two faculty members and three graduate students have participated in multiple international experiences. To address the recommendations of the panel, eight items were modified to more accurately measure Extension educators' willingness to participate in an IEE, and five items were added to give researchers a more accurate picture of the study's sample.

The instrument contained three sections. The first section measured participants' perceptions of how beneficial and relevant participating in an IEE was to their career. The second section measured participants' location appeal, activity importance, and barriers toward participating in an IEE. Participants were asked to rate 10 selected locations as destinations for participating in an IEE using a four-point summated scale (1 = *Not Appealing*, 2 = *Not Very Appealing*, 3 = *Somewhat Appealing*, 4 = *Very Appealing*). Next, participants were asked to rate 13 professional and personal development activities while participating in an IEE using a four-point summated scale (1 = *Not Important*, 2 = *Not Very Important*, 3 = *Somewhat Important*, 4 = *Very Important*). Finally, participants rated their perceptions of nine factors as barriers to participation in an IEE using a three-point summated scale (1 = *Not a Reason*, 2 = *Minor Reason*, 3 = *Major Reason*). The third section included items for participants to indicate their personal and professional characteristics. Reliability estimates for the constructs in this study were calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The reliability estimates were as follows: location of IEE $\alpha = .92$; activities during IEE $\alpha = .91$; and barriers $\alpha = .80$. According to the standards for scale reliability published by Robinson, Shaver, and Wrightsman (1991), all three scales possessed exemplary reliability.

Data Collection

Dillman, Smyth, and Christian's (2009) Tailored Design Method was used to collect responses from Extension educators. The researchers contacted Extension educators via SurveyMonkey® email describing the purpose of the study and containing a link to the questionnaire. Follow-up emails were sent via SurveyMonkey® to participants at the end of weeks one and two. Respondents and non-respondents were compared using independent samples *t*-tests. Respondents were considered those who responded to the questionnaire after the first and second mailings. Non-respondents were those who responded after the third mailing. No statistically significant differences were found between the early and late respondents on four key variables, namely, location appeal, activity importance, barriers, and preferred IEE length; therefore, the data were combined for further analysis.

Data Analysis

Data was collected and coded for analysis in SPSS 20. Data were analyzed for those Extension educators ($n = 57$) who indicated interest in participating in an IEE only. Research questions one through three were analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g. standard deviation, mean, percentage, and frequency). Research question four was analyzed using Spearman rho correlation coefficients. The strength of relationships was determined using Davis' (1971) coefficient conventions: $r = .01$ to $.09$ = *Negligible*, $r = .10$ to $.29$ = *Low*, $r = .30$ to $.49$ = *Moderate*, $r = .50$ to $.69$ = *Substantial*, and $r \geq .70$ = *Very Strong*. To address research questions five and six, respondents were separated into two groups. The decision was made to separate respondents based on Ajzen's (2006) assumption that individuals who have a more positive attitude toward a specific behavior are more likely to perform that behavior. Thus, those respondents who indicated that participating in an IEE was *Not beneficial at all* and *Not very beneficial* were labeled as "not beneficial" and those who responded that participating in an IEE was *Somewhat beneficial* and *Very beneficial* were labeled as "beneficial." Further, those respondents who indicated that participating in an IEE was *Not relevant at all* and *Not very*

relevant were labeled as “not relevant” and those who responded that participating in an IEE was *Somewhat relevant* and *Very relevant* were labeled as “relevant.” The group data were analyzed using independent samples *t*-tests to detect differences between groups. Statistical significance level of .05 was established *a priori*, and Cohen’s *d* was used to determine effect size (Cohen, 1988).

Findings

Research question one. This question sought to determine the personal and professional characteristics of respondents. Respondents ranged from 24 to 66 years of age with the mean age of 45 ($SD = 12.3$). The mean years of experience among respondents was 16.8 ($SD = 13.0$). Over half (30, 52.6%) of the respondents were male, and the overwhelming majority (48, 84.2%) were Caucasian. Three respondents reported having previous international experience, and two (3.5%) of the respondents indicated being fluent in a language other than English, specifically Spanish. Further, 26 (45.6%) respondents stated they had friends who were from outside the United States originally (see Table 1).

Research question two. This question sought to determine to what extent respondents perceived participating in an IEE to be beneficial and relevant to their career. As shown in Table 2, the respondents were separated into two groups based on response: not beneficial (*Not beneficial/relevant at all* and *Not very beneficial/relevant*); and beneficial (*Somewhat beneficial/relevant* and *Very beneficial/relevant*). Of the 57 respondents, 26 (45.6%) perceived participation as *Somewhat beneficial* and 10 (17.5%) perceived participation as *Very beneficial*. Further, 24 (42.1%) respondents perceived participation as *Somewhat relevant* (24, 42.1%) and 10 (17.5%) respondents perceived participation as *Very relevant* (10, 17.5%) to their career (see Table 2).

Table 1

Louisiana Extension Educators' Personal and Professional Characteristics (N = 57)

Characteristic	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Male	30	52.6
Female	27	47.4
Ethnicity		
African American	6	10.5
Caucasian	48	84.2
Native America	1	1.8
Other	2	3.5
International Experience		
Yes	3	5.3
No	54	94.7
Fluency		
Yes	2	3.5
No	55	96.5
Residence		
Inside city limits	16	28.1
Outside city limits	41	71.9
Friends from Outside U.S.		
Yes	26	45.6
No	31	54.4

Table 2

Louisiana Extension Educators' Perceived Level of Benefit and Relevance in Participation in an International Extension Experience to Their Career. (N = 57)

Level	<i>f</i>	%
Benefit		
Not beneficial at all ^a	7	12.3
Not very beneficial ^a	14	24.6
Somewhat beneficial ^b	26	45.6
Very beneficial ^b	10	17.5
Relevance		
Not relevant at all ^a	8	14.3
Not very relevant ^a	15	26.3
Somewhat relevant ^b	24	42.1
Very relevant ^b	10	17.5

Note. ^aNot beneficial/relevant (*not beneficial/relevant at all and not very beneficial/relevant*)

^bBeneficial/Relevant (*somewhat beneficial/relevant and very beneficial/relevant*).

Research question three. This question sought to identify Extension educators' perceptions of location appeal, importance of activities included, and barriers regarding participation in an IEE. Regarding respondents' appeal of location, the construct mean was 2.77 ($SD = .69$). The two locations with the highest means were Australia or New Zealand ($M = 3.32$, $SD = .78$) and Caribbean ($M = 3.14$, $SD = .77$). The location with the lowest means was Southeast Asia ($M = 2.25$, $SD = .95$) (see Table 3).

Table 3

Extension Educators' Perception of Appeal of Selected Locations as Destinations for an International Extension Experience.

Location	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
Australia or New Zealand	57	3.32	.78	Somewhat appealing
Caribbean	57	3.14	.77	Somewhat appealing
North America	57	3.11	.84	Somewhat appealing
Europe	57	3.11	.94	Somewhat appealing
South America	57	2.72	1.00	Somewhat appealing
Central America	57	2.70	.89	Somewhat appealing
South Pacific	57	2.56	.98	Somewhat appealing
Africa	57	2.46	1.04	Not Very appealing
Asia	57	2.32	1.00	Not Very appealing
Southeast Asia	57	2.25	.95	Not Very appealing
Construct	57	2.77	.69	Somewhat appealing

Note. Real limits: 1.00 to 1.49 = *Not appealing*, 1.50 to 2.49 = *Not very appealing*, 2.50 to 3.49 = *Somewhat appealing*, and 3.50 to 4.00 = *Very appealing*.

As for respondents' perceptions of the importance of activities in which to participate during an IEE, the construct mean was 3.27 ($SD = .56$). The two activities with the highest means were "Acquiring hands-on experience" ($M = 3.61$, $SD = .65$) and "Working one-on-one with a host country Extension educator" ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .73$). The activity with the lowest mean

was “Earning academic credit through courses at foreign universities” ($M = 2.25$, $SD = .89$) (see Table 4).

In regard to respondents’ perceptions of barriers, the construct mean was 1.62 ($SD = .43$). The perceived barriers with the highest means were “Financial cost” ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .53$) and “Time commitment” ($M = 2.65$, $SD = .61$). The perceived barriers with the lowest mean was “Lack of support from supervisors” ($M = 1.88$, $SD = .80$) (see Table 5).

Table 4

Louisiana Extension Educators’ Perceptions of the Importance of Activities during an International Extension Experience

Activity	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
Acquiring hands-on experience	57	3.61	.65	Very important
Working one-on-one with a host country Extension educator	57	3.40	.73	Somewhat important
Socializing with citizens of host country	57	3.28	.68	Somewhat important
Learning about a different culture	57	3.26	.72	Somewhat important
Participating in field research	57	3.21	.73	Somewhat important
Free time to do what you want	57	3.21	.67	Somewhat important
Traveling in country	57	3.12	.71	Somewhat important
Sightseeing	57	3.09	.71	Somewhat important
In-field lectures and labs	57	3.07	.80	Somewhat important
Learning and speaking the language of the host county	57	2.98	.72	Somewhat important
Staying with foreign host family	57	2.44	.78	Not very important
Attending non-credit classes at foreign universities	57	2.28	.80	Not very important
Earning academic credit through courses at foreign universities	57	2.25	.89	Not very important
Construct	57	3.27	.56	Somewhat important

Note. Real limits: 1.00 to 1.49 = *Not important* 1.50 to 2.49 = *Not very important*, 2.50 to 3.49 = *Somewhat important*, and 3.50 to 4.00 = *Very important*.

Table 5

Louisiana Extension Educators' Perceptions of Magnitude of Barriers to Participating in an International Extension Experience

Barrier	N	M	SD	Interpretation
Financial cost	57	2.79	.53	Minor reason
Time commitment	57	2.65	.61	Minor reason
Work obligations	57	2.61	.59	Minor reason
Family obligations	57	2.42	.73	Minor reason
Not aware of any programs related to my position	57	2.39	.73	Minor reason
Language barrier	57	2.37	.70	Minor reason
Potential for being victim of crime, terrorism, or unjust government action	57	2.23	.80	Minor reason
Potential for contracting diseases in foreign countries	57	2.11	.72	Minor reason
Lack of support from supervisor(s)	57	1.88	.80	Not a reason
Construct	57	1.62	.43	Not a reason

Note. Scale: 1 = Not a reason, 2 = Minor reason, 3 = Major reason

Research question four. This question sought to determine if relationships existed between Extension educators' prior international experience and their perceived level of benefit and relevance of participation in an IEE toward their career. The data analysis revealed two statistically significant relationships. Prior international experience had a positive and low association ($P = .27$) with the variable benefit. In addition, the variable relevance had a positive and moderate relationship ($P = .35$) with prior international experience (see Table 6).

Table 6

Relationships between Louisiana Extension Educators' Prior International Experience and Perceived Level of Benefit and Relevance of Participation in an International Extension Experience toward Their Career (N = 57)

Variable	r	p	Effect size interpretation
Benefit	.27	.045	Low
Relevance	.35	.007	Moderate

Note. The strength of relationships was determined using Davis' (1971) coefficient conventions: $r = .00$ to $.09$ = Negligible, $r = .10$ to $.29$ = Low, $r = .30$ to $.49$ = Moderate, $r = .50$ to $.69$ = Substantial, and $r \geq .70$ = Very Strong.

Research question five. This question sought to determine if differences existed between respondents who perceived participation in an IEE as not beneficial with those who perceived an IEE as beneficial regarding location appeal, activity importance, and perceived barriers based on their perceived level of benefit of participating in an IEE toward their career. There were no statistically significant differences found between respondents who perceived an IEE as not beneficial with those who perceived an IEE as beneficial regarding perceived barriers to participation in an IEE. However, there were statistically significant differences between respondents who perceived an IEE as not beneficial with those who perceived an IEE as beneficial when comparing their perceptions of location appeal ($t = 4.18$, $p = .000$) and activities importance ($t = 4.39$, $p = .000$) (see Table 7). The effect sizes for location appeal ($d = 1.13$) and activity importance ($d = 1.09$) were large according to Cohen (1988).

Table 7

Comparison of Louisiana Extension Educators' Perceptions of Location Appeal, Activity Importance, and Perceived Barriers by Construct

Construct by Group	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>	Effect Size Interpretation
Location Appeal							
Not beneficial	21	2.32	.69	4.18	<.001	1.13	Large
Beneficial	36	3.03	.56				
Activity Importance							
Not beneficial	21	2.90	.66	4.39	<.001	1.09	Large
Beneficial	36	3.48	.36				
Perceived Barriers							
Not beneficial	21	2.45	.56	.90	.373	--	N/A
Beneficial	36	2.34	.34				

Note. $p < .05$

Research question six. This question sought to determine if differences existed between respondents who perceived an IEE as not relevant with those who perceived an IEE as relevant regarding location preferences, activity preferences, and perceived barriers based on their perceived level of relevance of participating in an IEE toward their career. No statistically significant differences were found between respondents who perceived an IEE as not relevant and those who perceived an IEE as relevant regarding perceived barriers ($t = .90$, $p = .373$). However, statistically significant differences were found between respondents who perceived an IEE as not relevant and those who perceived an IEE as relevant concerning location appeal ($t = 3.51$, $p = .001$) and activity importance ($t = 5.48$, $p = .000$) (see Table 8). As such, the effect sizes for location appeal ($d = .92$) and activity importance ($d = 1.41$) were large (Cohen, 1988).

Table 8

Comparison of Louisiana Extension Educators' Perceptions of Location Appeal, Activity Importance, and Perceived Barriers by Construct

Construct by Group	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>	Effect Size Interpretation
Location Appeal							
Not relevant	23	2.41	.73	3.51	.001	.92	Large
Relevant	34	3.01	.56				
Activity Importance							
Not relevant	23	2.87	.57	5.48	<.001	1.41	Large
Relevant	34	2.54	.36				
Perceived Barriers							
Not relevant	23	2.52	.56	1.98	.053	--	N/A
Relevant	34	2.29	.30				

Note. $p < .05$

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The conclusions of this study are limited to Extension educators in Louisiana. Extension educators range in age from 24 to 66 years of age with an average age of 45. Further, Extension educators average 17 years of Extension experience and slightly over one-half of the educators are male. An overwhelming majority of the educators are Caucasian, have no previous international experience, and are not fluent in another language outside of English. Additionally, nearly three-fourths of the educators reside outside of the city limits in which they work and almost one-half of the educators have friends or family who reside outside of the United States.

Almost two-thirds of the Extension educators perceive that participation in an IEE is beneficial and relevant to their careers. Further, Extension educators view all locations as destinations for an IEE as somewhat appealing with the exception of Africa, Asia, and Southeast Asia which they perceive as not very appealing. Specifically, Extension educators perceive Australia or New Zealand and the Caribbean as the most appealing destinations for an IEE (Lamm & Harder, 2010).

Consistent with previous research regarding Trinidad extension officers' behavioral beliefs about IEE participation (Harder et al., 2011), educators view most activities in which to participate during an IEE as important, with acquiring hands-on experience as the most important. The activities in which Extension educators find least important are (a) staying with foreign host family, (b) attending non-credit classes at foreign universities, and (c) earning academic credit through courses at foreign universities. According to Ajzen (2006), if an individual perceives the favorable outcomes of a specific behavior to offset the unfavorable outcomes, the individual will be more likely to perform the specified behavior. Therefore, Louisiana Extension educators should be more inclined to participate in an IEE in the future because almost two-thirds of Extension educators perceive participation in an IEE as beneficial and relevant to their careers, view most locations as appealing and activities in which to participate during an IEE as important. Further, when designing opportunities for Extension educators to participate in an IEE, Extension administrators should target Australia or New Zealand and the Caribbean as locations for an IEE. In addition, opportunities for Extension educators to acquire hands-on experience and work with host country Extension educators while participating in an IEE should be included.

Extension educators who have participated in an international experience view an IEE to be more beneficial and relevant to their career. This finding supports previous research that found that participation in an international experience provides a multitude of personal and professional benefits for Extension educators, including personal and professional growth and a greater awareness of global matters (Blake, 2005). As such, a system-wide effort to promote and create opportunities for Extension educators to participate in an IEE should be employed.

Extension educators perceive selected barriers as minor reasons for not participating in an IEE. Consistent with previous research (Andreasen, 2003; Dooley & Rouse, 2009; Franklin et al., 2004; Lamm & Harder, 2010; Ludwig, 2001; Ludwig, 2002; Selby et al., 2004), the barriers Extension educators perceive as most hindering toward participation are (a) cost, (b) time commitment, and (c) work obligation. This finding suggests Extension educators perceive these barriers to impede on their ability to participate in an IEE (Ajzen, 2006). Therefore, Louisiana Extension administrators and others should assist Extension educators in finding financial support to participate in an IEE and allocate time off or dedicate a percentage of appointment for participation in international experiences. Further, informational small group sessions should be created to assist in eliminating perceived barriers toward participation in an IEE. Creators of these informational sessions should include guest speakers who have participated in an IEE in the past. The guest speakers should focus on topics such as (a) finding funding to support international travel, (b) how to incorporate international experiences into existing work obligations, (c) international program awareness, and (d) travel safety.

Extension educators who perceive participation in an IEE as beneficial and relevant to their career perceive locations for an IEE to be more appealing and activities during an IEE to be more important than Extension educators who do not perceive an IEE as beneficial or relevant to their career. This finding suggests that Extension educators in Louisiana have already formed behavioral beliefs toward participating in an IEE (Ajzen, 2006). However, there are no differences between educators who perceive participation in an IEE as beneficial and relevant to their career than Extension educators who do not regarding barriers. This finding supports Ajzen's (2006) postulation that individuals who have a more positive attitude toward a specific behavior are more likely to perform that behavior.

The findings from this study suggest that the data collected from Louisiana Extension Educators is only one small effort toward being able to understand participation in an IEE. To understand this phenomenon better, this study should be replicated with Extension Educators from other states and the results of those studies should be compared to the results of this study. Because slightly over one-third of the Extension educators did not perceive participating in an IEE to be beneficial or relevant to their career, a qualitative inquiry should be conducted. A qualitative study would provide researchers with a more deep and rich description of why these Extension educators perceive participation in an IEE to not be beneficial and relevant to their careers. In addition, a qualitative inquiry with semi-structured interview questions with Extension educators who have participated in an IEE in the past should be conducted to better understand their perceptions of the benefits and relevance of an IEE to their career. Specifically, the interview sessions should focus on their perceived barriers and concerns prior to participating in an IEE and how their perceptions of the benefit and relevance of participation in an IEE toward their career changed after participating. Further research should examine if relationships exist between Extension educators' focus area (e.g., 4-H Youth Development and Agriculture and Natural Resources) and perceptions of participating in an IEE. Lastly, this study examined differences among Extension educators who perceived participation in an IEE as not beneficial (*not very beneficial* or *not beneficial at all*) with those who perceived participation in an IEE as beneficial (*very beneficial* or *somewhat beneficial*) regarding location appeal, importance of activities, and barriers using construct means for each construct. Perhaps, a study examining differences between the two groups based on individual items of each construct rather than construct means would provide more insight to this phenomenon.

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